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Review of *The Activation Dilemma: Reconciling the Fairness and Effectiveness of Minimum Income Schemes in Europe*. Amilcar Moreira. Reviewed by James Midgley.

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rise and fall of the labor—liberal coalition, he clearly anticipates an audience of readers with a solid foundation in political science, labor economics, and public policy. Academicians and advanced graduate students are the groups that come to mind. While I recommend the book—certainly anyone who lived through the last four or five decades and possesses a scholarly interest in American politics will find themselves informed—the aforementioned foundation of knowledge will be critical to partaking of the book and concluding that it was a “good read.”

Larry Nackerud, University of Georgia

Amilcar Moreira, *The Activation Dilemma: Reconciling the Fairness and Effectiveness of Minimum Income Schemes in Europe*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2008. \$110.00 hardcover.

Although the task of providing income support during times of hardship has traditionally been carried out by religious and charitable bodies, governments have become increasingly involved. The poor relief programs established by the municipal authorities in Northern Europe in the late medieval period were subsequently augmented by national programs such as the Elizabethan Poor Law in England. This statute formed the basis for many subsequent programs designed to provide a modicum of support to the poor and destitute. By the 20th century, these programs had become commonplace even though there were periods of retrenchment when benefits were restricted as well as periods of relative generosity when social assistance was more widely used.

The issues of equity and effectiveness have often been invoked by both the opponents and supporters of social assistance or “minimum income schemes” as the author of this interesting book, calls them. He points out that arguments about the alleged ineffectiveness of these programs and claims that they unfairly target benefits on indolent, undeserving claimants have been frequently invoked in recent years, and in some countries have legitimated the curtailment of these programs. On the other hand, social assistance has also been denounced

for stigmatizing those in need and failing to provide adequate support.

However as Moreira reveals, minimum income schemes are widely used in Europe today. Despite the criticisms which have been levied at these programs by both the political right and left, they continue to play an important role in income protection. He also suggests that the normative perspectives which have been used to criticize these programs, such as those of Lawrence Mead and Philippe Van Parijs, are inadequate. Instead, he draws on the writing of Emile Durkheim to formulate a normative theory for sustaining social assistance based on the notion of "the right to personal development". This notion not only ensures that the right to a minimum income is fulfilled, but provides a basis for employment activation. Personal development, he contends, invokes notions of rights and responsibilities and creates the social expectation that those who are able to engage in productive employment should do so. Using these principles, Moreira examines social assistance programs in eight European countries showing that the most successful programs draw on these ideas and effectively combine the twin notions of right and responsibility. This approach, he suggests, resolves the "activation dilemma".

Although this book is to be commended for its use of theoretical concepts, it is sometimes unclear in articulating their application to social policy leaving the reader to infer conclusions that are not explicitly stated. On the other hand, it tackles a much neglected topic, and its argument that a viable normative basis for social assistance can be found is helpful. Its empirical analysis of social assistance in Europe and the cataloging of the many different programs that are used in Europe today is a major accomplishment. Despite its high price, this book is a valuable addition to the literature which has historically glossed over social assistance's contribution to income protection. It will be a major resource for students of comparative social policy everywhere.

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